

The Builder.

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IF a dozen books are before us, concerning which our readers may desire to hear a few words. Books of examples multiply fast: if architects go wrong hereafter in imitation, they will deserve little mercy. What has been done by our "middle-aged" predecessors, is being put, cut-and-dried, into the hands of our sucking Wykehams,—roofs, doors, windows, mouldings and all, with "their subordination, and the joints of the stone-work marked upon them,"—and in proportion as they stick to their copy-books, so will be the amount of praise or otherwise which they will receive. Far be it from us to decry the class of works to which we are alluding: to their value, their importance, their absolute necessity, our readers know we have borne constant testimony: but we certainly are most anxiously looking for a time to come when they will be made better use of than they are at present. To persist in reproducing undeviatingly the productions of a by-gone time, without reference to modern appliances and present views and requirements, which should be the foundation and motive of our works, would fix a stigma upon our age. To study the past, and to wish to resuscitate it, are two very different things,—as opposite as wise and foolish. As a foreign contemporary observes, when speaking of the architectural works contained in the present exhibition at the Louvre (a feeble list, as might be expected,—thirty-eight in number out of 5,1601)* architects no longer create, they content themselves with reproducing,—it is easier and less hazardous. "They despise the present, and care nothing for the future: all their hopes, all their aspirations turn towards the past, which alone appears to promise easy glory to all, without giving it to any. This is what the ultras in archaeology have brought us to. The architect is abdicating his right, to give place to the antiquary. The artist, essentially a creator, is turned into a measurer and caster, seeking vainly in the past what the present requires and the future will expect!"

If our early predecessors had stood still, what should we have had to imitate? As we have said again and again, recognizable advances in architecture are not made in a day; but for the sake of common sense and the credit of our age, let all doctrine tending to prevent this advance be most decisively discouraged, foremost in which is the ridiculous but unluckily too often repeated dogma,—"*do nothing without precedent.*" Consider this said to our chemists, to our machinists, to painters, to sculptors, and its absurdity becomes manifest at once. Let the principles which guided the great masters in our art guide us, for these will lead us onward as they were led: and let us regard the countless forms and ornaments which they produced, not merely as the store to which alone we are to be confined, but as evidence of the power of fancy, regulated by science, as examples for our study, and as incentives to emulation.

We will not run away, however, from the books before us. Mr. Blackburne's work, called "*Sketches for a History of the Decorative Painting applied to English Architecture during the Middle Ages.*" is finished to the extent at first proposed, and is most creditable to the author. It contains twenty-two plates, very nicely drawn, and coloured and gilt, like the objects represented, including wall paintings, screens, tombs, pulpit, &c., and is accompanied by a historical essay, shewing much pains-taking research. When we mentioned the first parts of the work some time since, we urged that the assigned limits were too narrow for the subject, and should be enlarged. This suggestion, we are glad to see, will be adopted in the shape of a second volume, and we hope that with it Mr. Blackburne will give an essay on the principles which guided the early decorators in the disposal of the colours.

We extract a portion of our author's remarks on the painting of roofs and ceilings. "It is to be observed," he says, "that in the open timber roof, the applications appear in many cases, in some necessarily, perhaps, from their construction, mainly on the principal timbers and mouldings: in others, the colours are introduced on every member. The roof of Aldenham is a very interesting and elaborate example of the latter kind. That of Impington, St. Mary's, Cambridgeshire, is of the former, and shows a simple arrangement of two columns, separated by a waving line, the fillets being white, on the faces of the tie-beams, very effective. The cornice also, which has an imitative battlement, produced by the introduction at equal distances simply of spaces of red colour, bordered by narrow white edges or fillets, intended to indicate the crenelled portions, or the naked wood of its fascia, is equally so."

"In the ceiled and in the groined roof, whether of wood or stone, the panels and spaces between the ribs received generally the principal decoration: the arched ribs in the one case, and moulded framework inclosing the panels in the other, being more or less ornamented in colour and gilding to accord. In some of the ceiled roofs, the panelled appearance was given solely by painting. This is exemplified both in the nave and transept ceilings in the Abbey Church at St. Alban's, and is a peculiarity apparent in some of the earliest examples, viz., those of the transept and the apse of choir at Peterborough. In the transept at St. Alban's, the ribs or framework are imitated by lines of dark brown and white colour, with yellow flowers as bosses at the intersections of the squares, separating the whole ceiling into bays corresponding with the number of the main arches of the structure, each of these bays being subdivided into spaces or panels alternately painted with the Holy Name, and angels supporting the emblazoned shields of benefactors. The panelling of the nave ceiling is produced in like manner by lines of red, brown, and white, with a kind of purple flower as a boss, the square of the panels being cusped or enriched with imitative tracery in red colour, and in the centre the monogram *Dr.* in white, on a ground of dark brown. In the corresponding ceilings of Peterborough, a similar practice is apparent."

"Where the ceiling is not thus imitative, but of the more general description, decorations on the mouldings of the framework are, in many cases, very profusely introduced, as in that of the Deanery at Worcester. In others, however, even under a full enrichment of the panels, the mouldings frequently appear decorated to a lesser extent, and are occasionally found altogether devoid of coloured ornament. Both in the richer one of the choir, and the more simply decorated ceiling of the nave, at Great Malvern, the mouldings inclos-

ing the panels, judging from their present appearance, seem never to have been painted, and the same peculiarity is exhibited in St. Michael's Church, Coventry. In the groined roof, the rib mouldings usually shew the more enriched character. The ribs of the groining in the choir at St. Alban's are covered with colour, diapered with minute ornaments in gold, &c., on the ogres and hollows, the leads being white, banded alternately red and green; and there are, besides, many other examples, in which similar ornaments are introduced to an equal extent."

It may be observed, that nearly all the examples given are of the 15th century, and that, with few exceptions, blue and red, with gildings, are the only colours used.

Of the extent to which colours should be used in churches we have not now to speak: we will simply say, with a divine of the 17th century,—"*There is, indeed, an excess to be avoided in beautifying holy places; but this consists rather in the kind than the measure of ornament. There are a sort of light, meretricious decorations, apt to infuse ideas unsuitable to the solemnity of the place and the sacred uses to which it is designed. The church must not be dressed in the attire of a harlot, but of a grave and serious matron: and provided the ornaments are agreeable to this character, the more magnificent they are, the more effectually will they engage our respect, and dispose us to reverence and devotion.*" And then we would say with old Fuller,—"*He must have a fixt aim and strong hand who hits decency, and miseth gaudiness and sluttish.*"

Another book of examples, but of a more recent period, is Mr. C. J. Richardson's fourth volume of "*Studies from Old English Mansions, their Furniture, Plate, &c.*" which completes the series, and will serve to preserve all the best works of the reigns of Elizabeth and James, as well as some much earlier.

The readers of *THE BUILDER* are so well acquainted with Mr. Richardson's effective style of drawing, and the range of subjects to which, up to this time, he has more particularly given his attention, that they scarcely require to be informed of what the book consists, or how it is executed. We may mention, however, as amongst the contents, the porch to the gate-house at Kenilworth: Gawsworth Hall, Cheshire; Interior, Gravel-lane, Houndsditch; Longford Castle, Wilt; Staircase, St. John's Cambridge; Various Views and Interiors of Aston Hall; with ceilings, friezes, candlesticks, and numerous details.

Without professing the same unlimited admiration of the style as our author, it is due to him to say that he has shewn, by judicious selection, that it has many excellences, and that few of the abominations which were once termed Elizabethan belong to it, but were "*weak inventions of the enemy.*" The previous volumes have been very popular, and this will doubtless not be less so.

Amongst the more purely archaeological works, yet bearing on our subject and exemplifying our remarks, is "*A Manual for the Study of Monumental Brasses.*" recently published by Mr. Parker, for the Oxford Architectural Society, which would have scarcely been called for, but as containing a descriptive catalogue of 450 "*rubbings*" in the possession of the Society. The work is very conveniently arranged, and the introduction contains much information, pleasantly conveyed. The following extract will serve as an example. The writer is speaking of the ex-

* Contributed by twenty-two exhibitors, and of which thirteen are archaeological, nine architectural.

• Williams and Co., Strand.

• Thomas M'Lean, 36, Haymarket.